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ABSTRACT

A study surveyed the views of 140 Tennessee members of the International Reading Association (IRA) regarding the state's Comprehensive Education Reform Act (CERA). The subjects, primarily elementary and secondary school teachers, were asked to respond on a five-point scale to statements concerning three elements of the CERA: (1) an incentive pay plan, (2) teacher evaluation, and (3) extended teacher contracts. The survey results showed both concern and support for aspects of the Tennessee CERA. The respondents did not view incentive pay plans as "the answer" to improving education in Tennessee. In fact, problems were seen with teacher morale and fairness in the administration of such a program. The respondents indicated that they were not necessarily against being evaluated and supported a probationary period for teachers before receiving permanent teaching certification. However, they felt that the actual criteria established for evaluation must be carefully considered, communicated to teachers, and fairly applied. They also preferred as evaluators those individuals most closely connected with the day-to-day operation of the schools. There seemed to be general support for the type of teacher activities being suggested for extended teacher contract periods. (HTH)

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A Survey of Tennessee IRA Members Regarding the Comprehensive Education Reform Act

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A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform (1983) states that salaries for the teaching profession should be performance-based, tied to an effective evaluation system; that school systems should adopt extended contracts for teachers; and that career ladders should be developed to distinguish among teachers. During 1983-84, the state of Tennessee initiated an ambitious plan to implement these and other recommendations in what was at first termed a Master Teacher Program, ultimately passing as legislation entitled the Tennessee Comprehensive Education Reform Act (CERA). Three elements of CERA, an incentive pay plan, teacher evaluation, and extended contracts, have generated extensive discussion and controversy.

Merit or incentive pay was the subject of an issue of Tennessee Teacher (1983), the official journal of the Tennessee Education Association (TEA). Definitions, historical perspectives, and problems with merit pay were presented. Among the problems of merit pay which TEA discussed were poor morale, the difficulty of distinguishing between merit and favoritism, and the difficulty of administering such a complicated program. In contrast, literature from the Tennessee State Department of Education (1983) pointed to several school systems which have successfully implemented merit pay. Teachers in those systems perceived incentive pay as special recognition for teaching excellence and as motivation to continue their excellent teaching practices. Tennessee Governor Lamar Alexander stated that the incentive pay plan would "make teaching a fully professional career, draw our best young people into it, keep our best teachers in it, challenge our best teachers to do even better, and inspire excellence in our classrooms by rewarding excellence in our teachers" (Parish, 1983).

Teacher evaluation aspects of CERA have also generated discussion. The

ability to establish objective criteria for judging teachers and to relate isolated factors validly and reliably to desired ends are questioned by some (Dalton, 1983). Others counter with arguments that it seems reasonable to establish criteria concerning teacher quality since teachers are continually required to judge the quality of their students' work.

Extended contracts as an issue relates to the extra pay teachers will receive for performing special services beyond the regular teaching year such as developing curricula, teaching special classes of gifted or remedial students, and performing other related tasks. To many individuals, the provision of a full year or eleven months of teaching and related services would give additional status to the teaching profession.

This paper describes a survey done to assess one group's reactions to three elements of educational reform described above: incentive pay, teacher evaluation, and extended contracts. The results provide insight into how this group perceives the current status of aspects of this newly established teaching plan for teachers.

The Survey

A random sample of the Tennessee members of the International Reading Association (IRA) were surveyed regarding their views of the three identified issues. One-third of the 606 Tennessee IRA members were mailed a questionnaire designed by the researchers. The initial survey plus two follow-up reminders resulted in 140 responses, a response rate of 70.0 percent (2 of the questionnaires could not be delivered). Table 1 shows the professional assignment, institution, and years of teaching experience of these respondents. They were primarily teachers (68.6 percent). The teachers were from both

TABLE 1

Characteristics of Respondents

Professional Assignment	N	Percent
Teacher	94	68.6
Consultant	4	2.9
Administrator	24	17.5
Researcher	6	4.4
Clinician	0	0.0
Materials Specialist	0	0.0
Other	9	6.6
Institution		
4 years College or University	24	18.2
2 year College	1	.76
Public or Private Agency	1	.76
Business or Industry	1	.76
Adult Center	1	.76
Secondary School	17	12.9
Elementary School	81	61.4
Other	6	4.5
Years of Teaching Experience		
0-5 Years	9	6.6
6-10 Years	23	16.8
11-15 Years	33	24.1
Over 15 Years	72	52.6

elementary and secondary schools. Over half of them had more than 15 years of teaching experience.

Teachers were asked to respond on a five-point Likert scale to six statements concerning incentive pay plans. Specifically, the statements addressed the effects of incentive pay on

- attracting individuals to the teaching profession,
- improving the quality of teaching, and
- staff morale.

For securing responses regarding teacher evaluation, seven statements on a five-point Likert scale and a checklist addressed such aspects as

- the use of student achievement gain,
- the importance of graduate education,
- the use of normed tests such as the National Teachers Exam and/or content area tests,
- the importance of classroom management, and
- the types of individuals who should serve as evaluators.

Respondents' views on extended contracts were probed through a checklist and open-ended responses. They were asked to check a list of seven activities which the special reading teacher could perform during an extended contract. The list was based on discussions reported in the media as possible activities for extended contracts. These included work in

- corrective/remedial programs
- gifted programs
- other enrichment programs
- curriculum development
- personal development
- assisting teachers at lower career levels, or
- evaluating candidates for career level advancement.

An open-ended probe was made regarding the activities that regular classroom teachers could perform in the area of reading education during an extended contract period.

Results

The reactions to the six statements regarding incentive pay plans are shown in Table 2. The percentage of respondents in each of the five response categories is shown. There was a wide variety of responses to the idea of whether incentive pay plans would attract more qualified individuals to the teaching profession. However, there does seem to be a trend toward disagreement that an incentive pay plan will improve the quality of teaching. The respondents showed a strong trend toward agreement that incentive pay plans will cause morale problems. The largest number of respondents were undecided whether fair, unbiased evaluations will occur in their systems.

The data from the teacher evaluation statements is presented in Table 3. Over 40 percent of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree that student achievement gains should be used in evaluating teachers; however, almost thirty percent of the respondents, at present, are undecided. A majority of the respondents felt that the amount and type of graduate education should be considered in evaluation. There is strong disagreement that teachers should be evaluated on a norm-referenced exam such as the National Teachers Exam. However, the percentage of disagreement was not as high when a statement specified only the measurement of knowledge and skills in content areas. Over 85 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that classroom management should be considered in evaluating teachers. There was strong agreement that teachers should complete a probationary period and that those who evaluate teachers should receive specialized training in teacher evaluation.

When asked to check those types of individuals who would be considered

TABLE 2

Responses Related To Incentive Pay Plans

Statement	Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree
	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)
1. An incentive pay system will attract more qualified individuals to the teaching profession.	15.33	24.82	30.66	18.25	10.95
2. The implementation of an incentive pay program will improve the quality of teaching.	5.76	22.30	31.65	20.86	19.42
3. An "across the board" increase in teaching salaries, rather than an incentive pay program, would improve the quality of education.	19.57	23.19	22.46	21.01	13.77
4. An incentive pay program will cause morale problems among individuals in the teaching profession.	38.41	23.91	19.57	15.22	2.90
5. Fair, unbiased evaluation concerning the administration of an incentive pay program is likely to occur in your system.	7.25	18.84	38.41	15.94	19.57
6. The establishment of career levels within school sytems will allow incentive pay to be allocated more fairly.	11.94	28.36	34.33	10.45	14.93

TABLE 3

Responses Related To Teacher Evaluation

Statements Related To Evaluation	Strongly Agree 1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	Strongly Disagree 5 (%)
1. A teacher's success should be judged by relative gains made in student achievement.	5.76	23.02	28.78	21.58	20.86
2. The amount and type of graduate education should be utiliized as a factor in the evaluation of teachers.	25.90	31.65	21.58	13.67	7.19
3. Teachers should be evaluated periodically through assessment on nationally normed tests such as the National Teacher's Exam.	4.29	10.71	19.29	19.29	46.43
4. Teachers should be required to take tests periodically to measure knowledge and skills in content area.	9.29	20.00	27.14	14.29	29.29
5. Classroom management is an important factor in measuring a teacher's success.	48.57	39.29	11.43	.71	0.00
6. Teachers should successfully complete a probationary period before receiving a permanent teaching certificate.	62.14	30.00	6.43	1.43	0.00
7. Those who evaluate teachers should receive specialized training in teacher evaluation.	82.01	14.39	2.16	0.00	1.44

Preferred Individuals for Evaluation Team

Type of Individual	N	%
Classroom teachers, currently teaching	116	83.45
Classroom teachers with advanced degrees	99	71.20
Supervisors	99	71.20
University professors	52	37.41
State department personnel	38	27.34
Other _____	32	23.02

appropriate on the teacher evaluation team, 83 percent of the respondents indicated that classroom teachers who were currently teaching were appropriate. Approximately 71 percent thought these teachers should have advanced degrees. When considering persons other than teachers, supervisors were checked by 71 percent and university professors by 37 percent.

All of the activities listed on the questionnaire as possibilities for extended contracts were viewed as appropriate for special reading teachers (Table 4), ranging from a high of 89 percent checking work in remedial/ corrective programs to a low of about 44 percent checking assistance in the evaluation of candidates applying for career levels. Activities recommended for regular teachers who work in reading programs during an extended contract are shown in Table 5. These responses were obtained through an open-ended question. The activities match those of the special teacher of reading, although the percentage of response is not as high. This is probably attributable to the open-ended response format.

Discussion

Incentive pay plans were not seen by the respondents as "the answer" to improving education in Tennessee. In fact, problems were seen with teacher morale and fairness in the administration of the program. This suggests that much thought and work must be given to addressing concerns if the incentive plan is to succeed in Tennessee. Teachers are not as yet convinced that incentive pay plans and the processes used to implement them will be free of problems that inhibit success.

Teachers in the survey were not necessarily against being evaluated. They

TABLE 4

Responses Related to Extended Contracts
for Special Teachers of Reading

Activity	N	%
Work in remedial/corrective programs	122	89.05
Work in gifted programs	79	57.66
Work with other enrichment programs	79	57.66
Work with curriculum development activities	110	80.29
Work on personal professional development activities	71	51.83
Provide assistance to teachers in professional levels lower than the one held by the teacher providing assistance	99	72.26
Assist with evaluation of candidates applying for professional level they do not hold but which is held by the teacher providing the assistance.	60	43.80
Other, please specify _____	7	5.11

TABLE 5*

Responses Related to Extended Contracts
for Special Teachers of Reading

Activity	N	Percent
Curriculum development activities	28	35.0
Work in gifted/enrichment program	27	33.8
Work in corrective/remedial program	27	33.8
Work with staff developmental activities	24	30.0
Personal professional development activities	19	23.8
Evaluating candidates for career level advancement	10	12.5
Developing/evaluating materials	9	11.3
Assessment of students (proficiency background)	8	10.0
Work with developmental students	7	8.8
Develop teaching activities and strategies	7	8.8
Work with content area students	6	7.5
Other	7	8.8

* 179 useable responses from 80 of the respondents.

supported a probationary period for teachers before receiving permanent teaching certification. However, the actual criteria established for evaluation must be carefully considered, communicated to teachers, and fairly applied. For example, this sample had reservations about the use of nationally normed tests such as the NTE and the use of student achievement gain scores.

Respondents had definite ideas about those who should evaluate teachers, specifying those individuals most closely connected with the day-to-day operation of the school as the preferred evaluators. These persons are probably viewed as being able to evaluate in a fairer and more realistic manner the duties required of the classroom teacher. It is also noted that supervisors are viewed positively as evaluators, possibly indicating favorable experiences with supervisors' evaluations in the past.

There seems to be general support for the type of teacher activities being discussed for the extended contract periods. Apparently respondents to the survey and the developers of Tennessee's program are in agreement on this point.

Summary

This survey showed both concern and support for aspects of the Tennessee Comprehensive Education Reform Act. It seems imperative that teachers and other educators be involved in every aspect of the program so that open, effective communication channels can be maintained. If this is not done, success of the program could be in question.

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